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UNCLAS BOGOTA 002052

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR INL/LP AND WHA/AND

E.O 12358: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: COMBINED COLOMBIAN POLICE AND ARMY AVIATION OPERATIONS

Ref: Bogota 0956

1. (SBU) Summary: Colombian Army (COLAR) helicopters recently supported a Colombian National Police (CNP) airmobile assault on cocaine hydrochloride (HCL) processing laboratories. The eight-day operation was notable not only for its operational results - three laboratories were destroyed and nearly two metric tons of cocaine HCL seized - but also for the cooperation between the COLAR and the CNP. Employing combined assets improved effectiveness. End summary.

2. (SBU) Following a spike in hostile ground fire directed at aerial eradication aircraft in CY2003 (Reftel), a number of countermeasures were undertaken to improve security. In addition to increased use of intelligence, ground troops conducted active screening operations in advance of aerial operations in areas of higher risk. The effect was a nearly fifty percent reduction in ground fire impacts in CY2004 compared to CY2003.

3. (SBU) Aerial spray operations in Narino Department have always been difficult and meteorological conditions limit the number of days when spray is possible. This major coca-producing area is highly contested between AUC and FARC elements. The CNP Antinarcotics Police (DIRAN) had insufficient available assets to conduct effective operations.

4. (SBU) In response to our request, COLMIL Commander General Ospina directed that COLAR's Plan Colombia Helicopter assets support the DIRAN operation. A Joint Task Force was established: the COLAR provided three UH-60 Blackhawks and four UH-1H gunships, and one UH-60 Blackhawk, three UH-1N gunships, and one C-26 intelligence/command-and-control platform was provided by the CNP. The CNP also provided 80 DIRAN Special Forces (Junglas) troops.

5. (SBU) The eight-day operation was successful: three cocaine HCL laboratories were destroyed and nearly two metric tons of processed cocaine HCL were seized, along with equipment and precursors. This was the first time that CNP personnel were transported by COLAR aircraft to conduct an airmobile assault. Despite several minor operational and communications disconnects, the training and tactical doctrines of the COLAR and CNP proved to be sufficiently compatible. After Action Reviews, which involved candid critiques and appraisals, were conducted in a spirit of cooperation.

6. (SBU) Comment: The COLMIL has been slow to embrace the concept of combined operations. We are hopeful that this positive experience will result in greater acceptance of the concept in the future. End comment.

WOOD